



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

(Embargoed until Wednesday 14 September 2011)

Media Alert

Catholic Bishops launch major statement on prisons and the justice system

The Hon. Graham West, Chief Executive of St Vincent de Paul NSW and former NSW Minister for Juvenile Justice, will launch the Australian Catholic Bishops' 2011–2012 Social Justice Statement on Wednesday 14th September. The respondent will be Mrs Margaret Wiseman of the Prison Chaplaincy of the Archdiocese of Sydney.

The launch will take place at 10.30 am at the Australian Catholic University's Leone Ryan Auditorium, 40 Edward Street, North Sydney.

The title of the Statement is ***Building Bridges, Not Walls: Prisons and the justice system***. The Statement points out serious shortcomings in Australia's prisons and in the justice systems, and challenges our citizens and politicians to search for a more constructive way forward.

Bishop Christopher Saunders, Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, says, "The majority of Australian prisoners come from the most disadvantaged sections of the community: Indigenous people, the underprivileged and those suffering from mental illness. Although rates of crime have overall remained steady, and in some cases have fallen, Australia's rate of imprisonment has increased dramatically. Between 1984 and 2008, the rate almost doubled.

"We must ask if the justice system is truly delivering justice to our community.

"Although there will always be a need for prisons to deal with serious offences, there are alternative measures that are more effective in delivering justice and keeping many people out of jail", Bishop Saunders says.

In the Statement, the Catholic Bishops call for more productive alternatives to fear campaigns about law and order, for an approach that addresses the social factors that contribute to crime, ensuring the dignity of those in prison, and providing more support for people returning to society.

The Statement urges all citizens to consider how we as a society can make a real difference for those in prison and seeking bridges to a new life.

Social Justice Sunday is celebrated on 25 September 2011. The Statement and associated resources can be downloaded at: www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au from 14 September.

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